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The public attribution of responsibility: an international comparison

Hasler, K ; Greuter, N

Abstract: The presentation of socially relevant events in the mass media can have a substantial impact on the public attribution of responsibility (Iyengar 1991). The mass media do not only monitor political processes, they also construct a political problem in a certain way that affects the citizens' perception of who is to blame and who should be held accountable. Further, the process of responsibility attribution, this is "who is responsible for what?" influences the image, the competences and the legitimacy of political authorities (Gerhards et al. 2007). Thus, by detecting reasons for the perception of a political problem, the media influences the political problem-solving process and the scope of problem solving strategies, which is crucial for the conditions of citizen's support. In other words, we consider the attribution of responsibility to be a pre-condition for framing effects (Entman 2004). The paper focuses on developing a content-analysis instrument according to Gerhards et al. (2007), in order to capture the elusive concept of the political public sphere. Based on a systematic analysis of different newspapers, we compare across countries (Israel, The United States, Germany and Switzerland) and across time (May 2010-September 2010) who is held responsible for the incident on the aid flotilla in May 2010 and who is asked to take action. The paper concludes that even though the media takes an essential part in constructing the public sphere, the process of responsibility attribution is driven by the political logic and not the one of the media. The growing intrusion of the media logic as an institutional rule that defines the appropriate behaviour of political actors must not be overestimated and depends to a certain extent on the institutional landscape. The prevailing state monopoly on relevant information and the lack of publicity of actors on the non-national level remains a stumbling block for the media as a fourth estate.

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**The Sixth Annual Graduate Conference in Political Science
The Hebrew University Mount Scopus Campus Jerusalem
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Panel Track

Greuter Nicole* & Hasler Karin**

**The public attribution of responsibility –
An international comparison**

Abstract

The presentation of socially relevant events in the mass media can have a substantial impact on the public attribution of responsibility (Iyengar 1991). The mass media do not only monitor political processes, they also construct a political problem in a certain way that affects the citizens' perception of who is to blame and who should be held accountable.

Further, the process of responsibility attribution, this is "who is responsible for what?" influences the image, the competences and the legitimacy of political authorities (Gerhards et al. 2007). Thus, by detecting reasons for the perception of a political problem, the media influences the political problem-solving process and the scope of problem solving strategies, which is crucial for the conditions of citizen's support. In other words, we consider the attribution of responsibility to be a pre-condition for framing effects (Entman 2004).

The paper focuses on developing a content-analysis instrument according to Gerhards et al. (2007), in order to capture the elusive concept of the political public sphere. Based on a systematic analysis of different newspapers, we compare across countries (Israel, The United States, Germany and Switzerland) and across time (May 2010-September 2010) who is held responsible for the incident on the aid flotilla in May 2010 and who is asked to take action.

The paper concludes that even though the media takes an essential part in constructing the public sphere, the process of responsibility attribution is driven by the political logic and not the one of the media. The growing intrusion of the media logic as an institutional rule that defines the appropriate behaviour of political actors must not be overestimated and depends to a certain extent on the institutional landscape. The prevailing state monopoly on relevant information and the lack of publicity of actors on the non-national level remains a stumbling block for the media as a fourth estate.

Comparative international political communication

The investigated issue is a new emerging discipline and has to be conducted by an interdisciplinary team of political and communication scientists. By its very nature, political communication is a product of the media and the political system, whereas one is in need of the other driven by its own logic. It remains utterly complex to track back the formation of political news in the process of political communication and to analyze the involvement of dominant actors and relevant processes. Since the rise of communication and media studies, a remarkable number of theories have been developed in respect to the interplay between media and politics (see Gurevitch & Blumler 1995, Esser & Pfetsch 2004). However, just a limited number of methodological instruments have been developed. The aim of this paper is to present an attempt of using an existing technique by Gerhards et al. (2007) in order to compare political communication across countries. Thus, to avoid the extensive analysis of the political communication process itself in an international scope, research in respect focuses on political news coverage. This perspective allows a broad international comparison of news content, as well as taking into account newspapers, media and political system characteristics (Hallin & Mancini 2004). Simultaneously it focuses on media and political actors, as a proxy in analyzing projections of power (Entman 2004).

Public attention in political conflicts and crises gives substantial reason to consider the news media to be a central arena for the conflict itself or at any rate for the negotiation of guilt and responsibility and the social relevance of the conflict. Political conflicts can involve a broad spectrum of international actors which are portrayed in the media from different national perspectives. It is of high interest to what extent international comparative content-analysis allows showing different national patterns of media structures, actors and media perspectives.

A building block of political communication is the public attribution of responsibility. The concept of responsibility itself has two advantages. On the one hand, responsibility is a social or moral concept, which can alter in respect to culture, context, actors and time. On the other hand, political responsibility is equal to formal accountability, and thus, at the heart of democratic legitimacy. In a globalized world it is essential for multi-national audiences to identify responsibilities within a complex international conflict and who is to blame or to endorse. From a normative point of view accountability of political actors to society through political communication is a core function of media to the quality of democracy (Gurevitch & Blumler 1990). However, who is publically hold accountable in an international conflict, such as the raid on the flotilla in May 2010, differs among nations and newspapers, but also among social groups and cultures.

We assume that the control over the political news in such a conflict is a core interest of the

relevant actors (or institutions) who are involved in the conflict. In contrast, the loss of control over political news can entail the danger of losing political support of democratically elected actors in the national system, but also on the international level, such as the United Nations or the European Union.

Political communication & framing responsibility

Political rhetoric applied by the authorities to maintain stability, power and legitimacy is one of the oldest *modus operandi* in politics, deeply rooted in the execution of power. Evidently, being considered as legitimate was and still is an indispensable moral resource for popular political support. Today, the strategic use of public communication to form, frame and guide the perception of political conduct in public is reborn with the struggle for attention in the highly mediated society. To date, a profound number of studies were written in order to understand how campaigning and control over the news agenda has an impact on winning elections, pushing policies and the success of people's initiatives (Entman 2004, Hänggeli & Kriesi 2010). Moreover, we argue that the strategic use of political communication is part of the daily political business, salient during election times, but especially crucial in time of political conflict or crisis.

In contemporary democracies the strategic use of news making is rather subtle and diffuse, than manipulative and propagandistic. On the one hand political actors face strong challenges from the media sector. The fight for public attention is a daily struggle inside mediated democracies (c.f. Mazzoleni & Schulz 2001). Depending on the role of the state in the media system, a state's journalistic professionalism, the media market and political parallelism (Hallin & Mancini 2004), autonomy of the media sector differs profoundly among democracies and consequently its impact in the construction of political reality. On the other hand political institutions are still obtaining a somewhat informational monopoly over political news and invest notable funds into professional and political communication management (c.f. Vogel 2010).

One political communication strategy is to stress particular aspects of public issues and to control this emphasis made upon these issues. Therefore, framing is to construct reality and to shape how the political environment is perceived in society. Frames are "central organizing ideas that provide coherence to a designated set of idea elements" (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002: 105). Since citizens have only limited access to the political system and its informational environment, they must rely on news media and are to some degree involuntarily exposed to how political reality is constructed through frames. Whether a frame has an impact on the individual perception or not, depends "on their relative accessibility, that is, the ease with which they come to mind" (Iyengar 1990:21).

Due to this exposure, frames construct a cognitive socio-political landscape, whereas the framed perspective ideally serves those who construct frames. On the one hand, the process of construction when going public can be a result of active frame construction by decisive actors. But on the other hand, in the multistep process of political communication, frames come into existence by "cascading network activation" (Entman 2004: 9). In other words cascading activation means the transaction of a specific perspective on an issue, whereas interests along involved political institutions, as well as the penetration with media logic, shape the form of the frame. Accordingly, the ability to promote frames is stratified because some actors have more power than others to push ideas along to the news and then to the public (Entman 2004: 9).

The most democratically relevant news frame in politics is inevitably the attribution of responsibility. Responsibility in politics means accountability to society, required throughout the official occupation of a political position. Politicians have to care about societal problems because society authorized them to do so. Responsibility and causality of political problems are always a salient issue in the public sphere and are at all times a dominant issue in public communication (Gerhards et al. 2007: 105). For example; who is to be hold accountable in times of financial crisis, is it politics, entrepreneurs, banks or regulatory agencies? Or, who is to be hold accountable in international conflicts? Who caused the problem and who is responsible? The involvement of several horizontal and vertical state and non-state actors in conflict or crisis situations blurs the distinction between responsibility and accountability in public. But social responsibility as a core issue in the public refers to both, responsibility, because it is a collectively shared social concept and accountability, because attributing responsibility requires accounting for one's conduct. Thus, for the support of political actors and their actions it is crucial to whom causes, responsibilities and competencies are attributed. The more relevance such a public body has to society, the more important it is to influence one's own support and perception within the mediated reality.

The process of attributing responsibility predominantly takes place within the public sphere. According to Gerhards et al. (2007) political news are not only reported but expediently constructed and interpreted. Personal interpretation through political and media actors is an aligning process in the construction of frames. As a matter of fact, the frame building provokes two consequences: On the one hand, the attributions of causalities and responsibilities are connoted to contextual policies or incidents and determine to a certain degree how the problem is associated and approached by the responsible political actors. On the other hand, attributing responsibility and causalities has an effect on citizens, because evaluation and estimation of political actors are experienced indirectly, through the media because of the public's limited access to politics (Gerhards et al. 2007: 106). Citizens who read in the news about poor political performance attributed to a particular actor likely

might rethink their support when going to the polls and call their representatives to account. Furthermore it is of outstanding relevance for international actors how they present themselves in crisis and conflict situations because this is when *power is distributed*¹ in the presence of multi-national audiences.

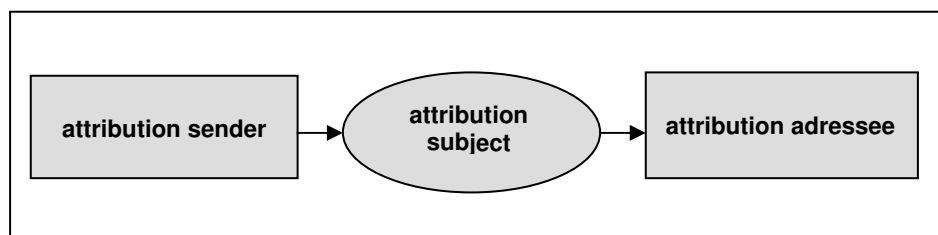
Iyengar argues similarly that societal perception of responsibility in terms of leadership and political processes can convey significant policy implications (Iyengar 1990: 36). Hence we argue that framing responsibility through political communication is a key variable in the construction of (latent) support and democratic accountability.²

Apart from their implications, frames refer to three different classes of objects: political events, issues and actors (Entman 2004: 24). Accordingly the success of a frame depends on the extent these three reporting classes concertize within the same frame of reference. In the given situation the military raid on the flotilla corresponds with the *event*, within the context of Middle East conflict (*issue*) and the multi-lateral involvement of Israel, Turkey, the US, the Palestinian Territories, and the UN and to some extent the European community (*actors*). However, the aim of this paper is not analyzing the success of a specific frame, but to analyze and compare the construction of an event-frame in different newspapers from the advent of the event to the dissolution of its press coverage.

From a theoretical perspective a frame has to pass four steps in order to become a fully developed narrative. These steps, respectively functions, are: (a) defining problematic effects/ conditions, (b) identifying cause/ agent, (c) endorsing remedy, and finally, (d) conveying moral judgment (ibid. p. 24). Taking into account the nature of an event like the raid on the flotilla, defining the problem (a) is already given. At this point it offers to combine with Gerhards' responsibility attribution for content analysis which, to large extents, covers frame functions (b), (c) and (d). Thus, applying the attribution of responsibility to Entman's framing theory perfectly fits for our content analysis. Hence, according to Gerhards', an actor attributes a cause to another actor (b), and by doing this judges the attribution negatively (blame, failure) or positively (success) (d). In contrast to attributing causes for success or failure, actors attribute responsibility for problem solutions to actors (c) whom they consider competent. For instance in the context of the given flotilla incident: Turkey accuses (d) the Israeli military (b) of inadequate reaction to the behaviour of the activist on the boat (a) and calls Israel (b) for an apology (c). An attribution is, therefore, only complete, if the triad of attribution sender, addressee and subject is fully given within the semantic structures of the article (Gerhards' et al. 2007: 110f).

¹ C.f. Entman 2007

² C.f. Meyer 1999



Attribution triad: Gerhards et al. 2007: 111

Coding triadic constellations allows taking into account different actors as senders and addressees across countries, including journalists who speak for themselves. Hence, communication through the media in respect to public responsibility is especially important, because communication can be carried out between actors of different horizontal and vertical levels.

However, according to Gerhards, attention within the scientific community to this crucial social phenomenon has been very poorly approached and is theoretically, methodologically and empirically underdeveloped (Gerhards et al. 2007: 106). Thus, after all, we consider Gerhard's "attributing responsibility" as an appropriate instrument for comparing political communication but also as a contribution to the current discussion on framing and its potential for analyzing "projections of power" Entman (2004).

Methodology

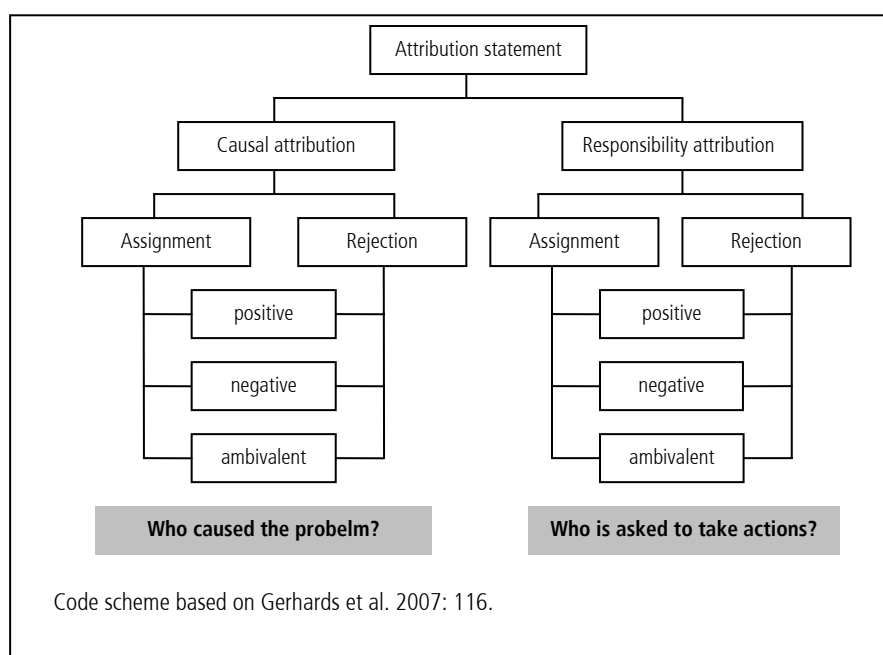
In order to gain an accurate sample of news press coverage, we chose two national newspapers for each country (Switzerland: Tages Anzeiger, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Germany: Die Tageszeitung, Berliner Morgenpost, USA: Washington Post, New York Times and from Israel: Haaretz, Jerusalem Post, English versions). Each of these newspapers enjoys considerable influence in the country of respect. Further we tried to pay attention to an equally distributed liberal and conservative spectrum of the newspapers' political orientation.

The flotilla event is dated on the 31st of May 2010, when the raid by the Israeli military took place on one of the six ships. The aid flotilla for the Gaza strip was organized by the Free Gaza Movement and the Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (İHH) and carried activists from across the world. We identified all relevant articles by their headlines (through keywords and temporal limitation) from May 31 until some days after the UN report was published on September 24 in 2010.

25 articles per newspapers were coded along a previously constructed codebook. Developing a codebook for a framing-analysis is a rather qualitative process, whereas its analysis is purely quantitatively. The codebook is generated by pre-testing a random

collection of the news article sample. This allows coding the event as such in its context, as well as the associated subjects, all relevant actors and some formal criteria of the newspapers. Once the codebook is completed, it cannot be altered any longer. Even though there might be additional emerging issues during coding, these cannot be taken into account in the present analysis.

Finally, the single units of the dataset consist of one full attribution with regards to Gerhards' et al. framing technique (c.f. Gerhards' et al 2007: 110). An attribution is only considered to be complete when it includes the triad of the attribution sender, addressee and attribution subject (e.g. "the behaviour of the activist on the flotilla") within the scheme of responsibility. Depending on the language in respect, the semantic scheme can be visible in a single sentence but also, the attribution elements can be distributed over half of the article. Further, Gerhards et al. distinguish between causal attribution of success (positive) or failure (negative) and attributing responsibility for problem solutions, whereas both can be rejected or assigned by the ones to whom responsibility is ascribed to. Having coded actors as attribution senders and addressees, as well as the subjects of responsibility, coding the attribution character (see scheme below) completes one unit of analysis.



Results

Structural features of responsibility attribution

One of the main concerns by Gerhards et al. (2007) in applying their coding scheme is the low density of attribution (attributions per article). In their analysis they scored a density value of 1.41. In our study,

however, we achieved a density of 3.15. This difference is probably due to the fact that we analyzed a specific event and not the public role of an actor in general as Gerhards et al. did in his study of

Attributions						
Causal			Competence			Total
76.5%			23.5%			
N=481			N=148			
positive	negative	ambivalent	positive	negative	ambivalent	
20.2%	72.7%	7.1%	83.8%	12.8%	3.4%	
N=102	N=345	N=34	N=124	N=19	N=5	N=629

the European Union. Furthermore, the analyzed event can be categorized as a crisis where the search for the causes of political failures starts immediately and established authorities are questioned. In such a context the public discourse depicted in the media relies on responsibility attributions which imply a high density of attributions per article.

From a structural point of view, the content analysis has two major findings. First, there is an overall pattern of the ratio between causal attributions and competence attributions: three quarters of all attributions are causal statements and one quarter refers to the attribution of competence (see table 1). This holds true for all newspaper, as well as for each country. The results show also a consistent pattern of the characteristics of the attributions: 75% of the causal attributions are negative. In the majority of the attributions someone is blamed for a failure. If competence attributions are considered, there are approximately 80% positive statements if all data sources are evaluated as well as at the national level. The data analysis indicates that ambivalent statements neither the causal nor to the competence related ones, are of substantial relevance. These findings are congruent to the results of Gerhards et al. (2007). The “communicative attack” dominates the public debate. However, we found a much stronger score on the competence attribution variable. Gerhards et al. detect only in 6.8% statements a competence attribution (p.119). This is probably due to the discourse logic in a crisis context as discussed above.

Second, self-attributions are less frequent than attributions by another actor. Only in 10 out of 100 cases an actor attributes success or failure to himself. In the remaining cases, a success

Table 1: All newspapers

or a failure is attributed to someone else. Surprisingly, negative self-attributions (31.8%) are almost as frequent as the positive (43.9%) ones. The hypotheses of Gerhards et al. (2009) that actors attribute successes to them and simultaneously pursue the strategy of blame-shifting can not be confirmed that unambiguously as by the data of Gerhards et al. (2009). From a point of view of a communication strategist acknowledge a mistake can increase the public reputation of an actor. Those who recognize and admit mistakes and learn from them are perceived as strong and responsible actors and also it minimizes the risk of being blamed by others.

Attribution between actors

The actor constellation (see table 2) corresponds largely to the results of Gehrhardt et al. (2009).

The political actors are the one that are sender and addressees in the first place. This becomes even more evident if all aggregated groups that are linked to the political system are considered: “politics”, “military” and “international level”. They have a total share of more than 70%. This is a substantial evidence for a monopoly on relevant information of the political actors that enables them to

Aggregated actor groups		
	Sender	Addressee
Politics	46.2%	57.3%
Military	9.1%	12.3%
Media	14.4%	2.6%
Experts	5.8%	0%
Civil society	5.4%	5.3%
International level	14.4%	9.7%
Others	4.7%	12.8%
	N=606	N=606

substantially shape the public discourse. In terms of Hallin/Mancini (2004) this supports the hypothesis of political parallelism³. Tabel 2: All newspapers

As “Israel” is the main sender and addressee in the national media coverage under scrutiny, it is fruitful to discuss this actor in detail.

Israel in the public discourse: a comparative perspective

To compare the different news coverage across the countries under scrutiny, it is sensible to distinguish between the country that was directly exposed to the event and the other countries that have an observer perspective. Of course, one must be aware of the different relations of the US, Switzerland and Germany with Israel when drawing conclusions from the

³ Political parallelism is one among four characteristics used by Halling & Mancini to compare media systems. Political parallelism refers to independent journalism and its significant autonomy opposite the political system (see 2004: 217f.). It is closely linked to the concept of journalistic professionalism.

empirical results.

First we will discuss the news coverage in Israel. In approximately one quarter of all attributions, Israel acts as a sender and about 80% of these statements are positive self-attributions. In 30% of the cases, Israel uses the strategy of blame-shifting: negative attributions are made in equal parts to the participants of the flotilla and to the UN. In around 40 out of 100 cases, Israel is an addressee of an attribution. In 17% Israel depicts itself, mostly positive. To the same part, Israel is blamed for the incident by Turkey (17%), the UN (13%) and the US (9%) as well as the media (9%). Second, the news coverage in the observer countries is under scrutiny. In the US, again around 40 out of 100 cases are attributions with Israel as a Sender, but not the positive self-attributions are predominant, rather Israel is presented as blaming itself for the raid on the flotilla. Furthermore, Israel is asked to take actions. In the US newspaper, the Israeli military is a key player. Israel blames the military for the incidents on the flotilla and demands an active role of the military in the investigation process. The attributions with Israel as an addressee consist of approximately 40% responsibility attributions to Israel. In addition to the self-attributions mentioned above, the Israeli military and the US

Top 3	
Sender	%
Israel	21.8
Media	11.9
Turkey	8.3
Addressee	%
Israel	39.5
Military	12.8
Activists	5.4
Subject	%
Raid on flotilla	23.3
Middle East conflict	11.6
Investigation	13.1

Tabel 3: All newspapers

address Israel in the newspapers: the military in a negative way and the US in a majority of the cases in ambivalent way with a slightly positive tendency. The same applies for causal and responsibility attributions. The international level, however, almost unanimously blames Israel for its actions.

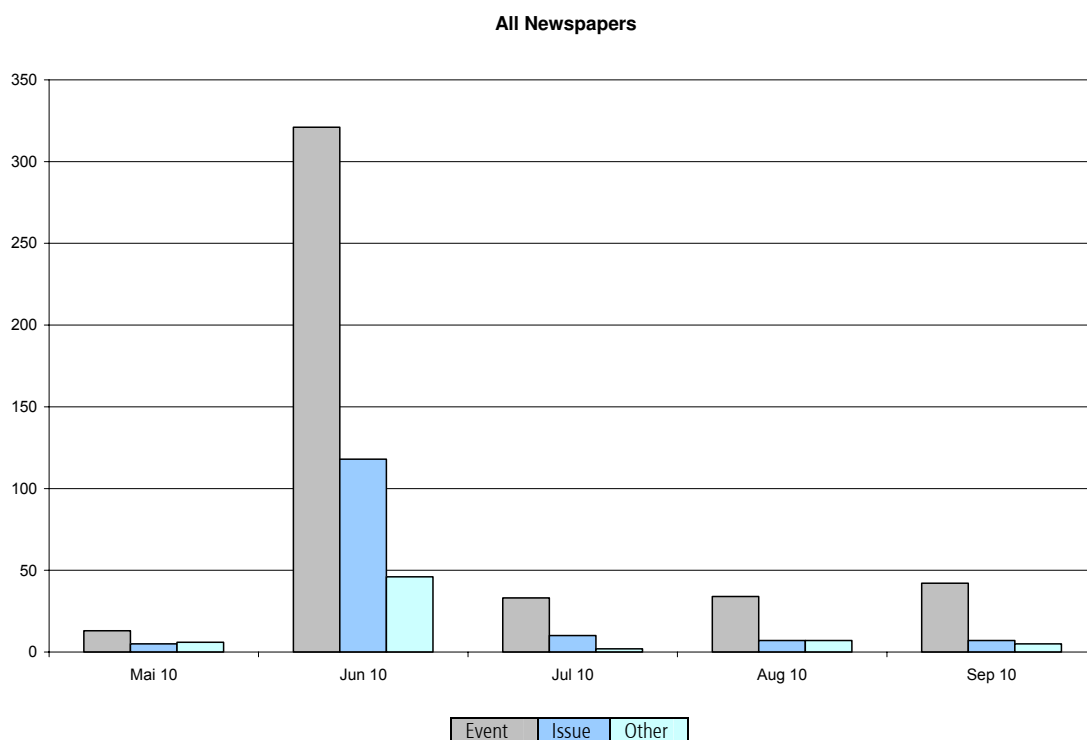
In the German newspapers, only 17% of all attributions are made by Israel, therefore the significance is limited. There is no polarization in the public debate; the blame is almost equally shared amongst the relevant actors if the attributions made by Israel are considered. Besides the fact that there are only a small number of attributions at all, the Israeli military is approximately equally present in the media as the government of Israel. The Israeli government does not get as much space in the media as in the other countries. In a third of the attributions Israel is the addressee, as in the sender-scenario, there is a balanced attribution-pattern with no polarization.

Finally, Switzerland is scrutinized. As in Germany, only 17% of all attributions are made by Israel and the majority are positive self-attributions. Israel also attributes the UN a positive role in the incident. In the Swiss newspapers, Israel blames the activists for the flotilla incident in 16% of the attributions the Israeli governments makes. The media has the most

dominant role if attributions to Israel are considered: a quarter of the attributions are sent by the media and more than 90% are of a negative character. The second important sender in the public discourse is Turkey (19%): two thirds of the attributions are negative, but at the same time, Turkey asks Israel to take an active role in the investigation process.

Comparison over time: Issue or event?

Besides patterns of responsibility attribution, the content analysis according to Gerhards et al. (2007) provides valuable insights on the level of conflict in the public discourse. The coded subjects allow making a distinction between issues and events⁴. The “issues” refer to the news coverage of the Middle East conflict in general and the “events” to the specific incident on May 31st, 2010.



The relevance of this differentiation is twofold. On the one hand, it can be used as an indicator of the quality of journalism in a country. The higher the percentage of subjects that are categorized as issues, the higher the quality of journalism, because the discussion of the Middle East conflict in general implies more background information and more opinion-forming news coverage. By contrast a higher percentage of “events” indicates that the

⁴ Subjects coded as „Event“: Raid on flotilla, action of the Israeli Military, action of the activists on the flotilla, action of the Israeli government, investigation of the incident, political orientation of the activists.
Subjects codes as “Issue”: Sea blockade, Middle East conflict, terrorism, anti-Semitism,
Subjects coded as “Others”: Passivity, None.

incident is not discussed in a broader context and one can assume that the journalists mostly rely on agency reports and that investigative journalism is lower than in the news coverage with a high proportion of “issues”. On the other hand, the ratio of “events” and “issues” shows if the intended purpose of the activists – to increase public attention for the situation in Gaza – was achieved. Hence, the PR action should

show a lasting effect in the news coverage. The diagram for all newspapers highlights that there was only a short-time effect of the incident on May 31st. In June 2010, the media

Frames	Amount	%
Event	434	77%
Issue	120	21.3%
Total of attributions:564		

actually makes the Middle East issue a subject of discussion compared to the month before the incident and the ones afterwards. Furthermore, approximately one quarter of the attributions refer to the issue (See table 4). But the effect is not at all long lasting.

In a comparative perspective, there are no major differences among countries. Switzerland is the only case where the “Middle East conflict” subject is more often than any coded “event” subject. In the US and in Israel, the media emphasizes the importance of the investigation of the incident.

Conclusion

The content analysis according to Gerhards et al. (2007) offers a convincing tool to depict the politically relevant aspects of the public discourse. Even more, the gathered attributions of responsibility are suitable for a proxy of the projection of power in the sense of Entmann (2004). Attributing responsibility, in a positive or negative way, is fundamental in a representative political system and the media play an important role as a transmitter. Aware of this fact, political actors have an incentive to control the portrayal of political issues in the media. Therefore, we assumed that actors try to capture as much of the public sphere as possible to present themselves in a favourable position. The event of the aid flotilla confirms this strategy of political actors. Approximately 75% of all attributions are of a negative character. Thus, our findings show as well the dominant pattern of the “communicative attack” as detected by Gerhards et al.

Governments and institutions close to the government are the main senders and addressees in the content analysis performed in this study. The civil society and, especially the flotilla activists who planned a PR activity, have no voice in the public discourse. Furthermore, they did not succeed in bringing the situation in Gaza on the public agenda. The media effect of the incident was not at all long lasting. They did not only fail in presenting their issues directly in the media as a sender, but they also failed in bringing up the topic via other actors. Therefore, the event also confirms that the public discourse is a valuable proxy for the

projection of power: it shows the strength of the state actors as well as the weakness of the societal actors to present their issues in the media. Further, the role of the media as a fourth estate should be questioned. Our results did not portray the media as an actor on its own perspective.

Our results show two explanatory factors for the structural power in the mediated public sphere. Structural access in terms of *visibility* in the news and structural access in terms of *control* over the news content are the most decisive factors in projecting power through the news media. Hence, it is not sufficient to be in the media but how to be portrayed in the media in order to legitimize oneself or to delegitimize antagonists. Additionally, it confirms some of Wolfsfeld's thoughts on the dependence on the news media (1999: 22). Addressing structural access to news in respect to power can be best explained by *cumulative inequality*, meaning that those who are most in need of the news media are those who find it the most difficult to obtain them (Wolfsfeld 1999: 24). Referring to the war in Bosnia, Wolfsfeld points out that only after remarkable journalists' effort the NATO issued an ultimatum to the Serbs to end their blockade of Sarajevo of 1994 after their bloody attack (1999:23). With respect to the Middle East conflict, the situation is somewhat similar. The access of the minority group to the relevant news media is impeded by the power over the news by the majority group. Hence, the majority group is structurally empowered to control the news media caused by the dynamics of *cumulative inequality*. The intention of the activists to frame the flotilla incident can be interpreted as a try to break this very dynamic.

However, what remains visible in the media, therefore, is very likely to be a mirror of how refeudalized⁵ the public sphere is, unless the media tries to represent and integrate *all* relevant aspects of the issue in respect. But the current study shows that the news media to large extents publishes elite's perspectives and only very few offers voice to less powerful actors in a given situation. It is stunning to what extent the media ignores Palestinian or activists voices in important western newspapers but also the weakness of the media to integrate the incident into the Middle East conflict. Unfortunately, we did not cover any English Palestinian newspaper, Turkish or other Arab English news. It goes without saying that this was considered in the interpretation of our results.

With regards to the framing theory, the incident under scrutiny only contributes to event framing. The frequency of who attributes (positively or negatively) what to whom through the news media, provides profound insights into the characteristics of the event frame. But to analyze to what extent this event frame conforms to the overall habitual scheme (issue, event and political actors, Entman 2004: 24) of the Middle East conflict requires further operationalizations for issue and actor frames. Nevertheless it is of high interest how the

⁵ Habermas (1989) uses this term to express the structural power within the public sphere.

schemata of the Middle East conflict contain an overarching *paradigm* (ibid. 24).

From a methodological point of view, this procedure involves several challenges. Gerhards et al. (2007) mention the problem of the intercoder-reliability (Gerhards et al. 2007: 117) and the low density of attributions in the media. These difficulties arise from the sophisticated code book that is, however, essential to cover the attributed responsibilities. We proceeded in an explorative way that allowed us to modify Gerhards et al.'s approach. We reduced some of his categories and performed the content analysis in the context of a particular event instead of a general time period. The analysis of a crisis event increases the density of attribution and makes the latent structure of power more evident and eases therefore the data collection of responsibility attributions. Consequently, one has only a snapshot and to draw general conclusions about the allocation of power, further investigation over time and space is required. However, the approach suggested by Gerhards et al. is a promising tool for national and international comparison of political communication strategies and the distribution of power in the public sphere.

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